

Suspect in congressional shooting was Bernie Sanders supporter, strongly anti-Trump

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GOP baseball gunman was anti-Trump

3:11



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James T. Hodgkinson, the man identified as **shooting a Republican member of congress** and four others on Wednesday morning, was a small business owner in Illinois who defined himself publicly by his firm support of Bernie Sanders’ progressive politics – and his hatred of conservatives and President Donald Trump.

This is based on CNN’s review of Hodgkinson’s **Facebook profiles**, public records, and three years of impassioned letters to his local newspaper.

“Trump is a Traitor. Trump Has Destroyed Our Democracy. It’s Time to Destroy Trump & Co.” **he posted** on his personal Facebook page on March 22.

“Republicans are the Taliban of the USA,” he posted in February.

Hodgkinson, 66, was married and lived in Belleville, Illinois. He started his own company, JTH Inspections, in 1994 and conducted home inspections and mold/air-quality testing.

But he quit that job on New Year's Eve last year, according to **one of his two Facebook profiles**. Illinois state records show that he dissolved his company on January 10.

Federal law enforcement identified Hodgkinson as the shooter who attacked Rep. Steve Scalise, a congressional staffer and members of the congressional police force, Wednesday morning in Alexandria, Virginia. Hodgkinson died following a gun battle with police, authorities said.

His politics

Hodgkinson's online presence was largely defined by his politics. For example, his public Facebook posts date back to 2012 and are nearly all about his support for liberal politics. He was passionate about tax hikes on the rich and universal health care.

In the past year, most of his Facebook posts consisted of **signed petitions** on Change.org with titles such as: "Bernie – please run no matter what;" "Hillary Rodham Clinton should concede the nomination to Bernie Sanders;" and "Healthcare for all Americans."

In one public post on May 24, he signed a petition to “Stop the NEXUS Pipeline” in Michigan and Ohio. After Hodgkinson’s Facebook profiles were discovered by news reporters, they were updated to prevent public access.

On Wednesday, **Senator Sanders publicly acknowledged** that Hodgkinson had volunteered for his presidential campaign last year, but he denounced the violence as “despicable.”

Hodgkinson’s own descriptions on social media portray him as an avid consumer of political shows. His favorite television shows were listed as “Real Time with Bill Maher;” “The Rachel Maddow Show;” “Democracy Now!” and other left-leaning programs.

His favorite movie? The documentary “Inequality for All,” featuring progressive economist Robert Reich.

He had also joined several anti-GOP Facebook groups, including “Terminate The Republican Party;” “The Road to Hell Is Paved With Republicans;” and “Join The Resistance Worldwide!!”





(Derik Holtmann/AP)

Public records that align with the alleged shooter's name and personal details also match the descriptions on Hodgkinson's Facebook profile: his business, location, wife, and wife's employer.

Federal Election Commission records show Hodgkinson donated \$18 to Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign through the fundraising platform ACT Blue in 2015 and 2016.

Hodgkinson appears to have written **more than a dozen letters to the Belleville News-Democrat**, a local paper, from 2010 to 2012. One of the final letters from Hodgkinson, in July of 2012, called for President Obama's re-election and to "vote all Republicans out of Congress."

In the letters, he wrote extensively about income inequality and called repeatedly for higher taxes on the rich.

Hodgkinson also engaged with his own representative. Congressman Mike Bost said in a statement that Hodgkinson contacted his office 10 times in recent months with complaints about the Republican's stance on health care and his voting record.

Past run-ins with police

A police report in Illinois also details an incident in 2006 with Hodgkinson's daughter and her friends – one that involved a gun. When Hodgkinson's daughter was at a female friend's home, he and his wife allegedly tried to take her away from there.

The report says Hodgkinson resorted to dragging his daughter out of her friend's car, slashing her seatbelt, and punching his daughter's friend in the face.

The young woman's boyfriend later confronted Hodgkinson, and Hodgkinson pulled out his shotgun, hit the younger man in the face with the wooden stock of the gun, then fired a single shot that missed, according to police. Hodgkinson was charged with two counts of battery, aggravated discharge of a firearm, criminal damage to a motor vehicle and two counts of domestic battery. None of the three victims showed up in court, so the case was dismissed later that year.

Another, more recent incident, occurred three months ago. Deputies with the St. Clair Sheriff's Office were called when locals heard "shots fired" in a residential neighborhood, according to police records. Deputies found Hodgkinson shooting a hunting rifle. But because he had properly registered himself as a firearms owner with the state of Illinois, deputies merely advised him to shoot safely.

'Unacceptable behavior'

For a time, Hodgkinson worked as an independent subcontractor doing lead paint removal for the St. Clair County's housing rehabilitation and weatherization program, according to county board chairman Mark Kern.

But he was fired as an independent contractor in 2003 from the St. Clair County Intergovernmental Grants Department for "unacceptable behavior," Kern said. He declined to elaborate on the incident.

Hodgkinson came back in 2012 and sought paperwork to be reinstated as an independent contractor but he never returned the paperwork.

“There were enough employees that were still there that remembered him. The situation still stood from ’03 and he would not have been allowed back into the program,” Kern said.

His views on Scalise

On Facebook in 2015, Hodgkinson made at least one comment about the Republican congressman he is accused of eventually attacking in person.

“Here’s a Republican that should Lose His Job, but they Gave Him a Raise,” Hodgkinson said of Scalise, pointing to a **cartoon** about the congressman.

The cartoon – which featured Scalise addressing a racist crowd of members of the Klu Klux Klan – referenced how **Scalise had been caught** speaking to a white supremacist group more than a decade earlier when he was a state legislator in Louisiana.

The guns

Federal agents are now tracing the origins of the two firearms recovered at the scene of the crime: an SKS 7.62x39 rifle (made in China) and a 9-millimeter pistol, according to a law enforcement source. It is believed Hodgkinson shot at the politicians and staffers with the SKS rifle.

It is unclear how Hodgkinson obtained his firearms. But he did have a legal right to own them.

Hodgkinson had an Illinois firearm identification card and a concealed carry license in the state, which would have allowed him to legally obtain a weapon in Illinois, according to a local law enforcement official who requested anonymity.

Illinois tracks firearm owners – but not their weapons. The state does not require firearm owners to register their firearms, according to the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. CNN has filed a public records request to obtain records of Hodgkinson’s firearm identification card.

However, Hodgkinson had no hunting permits in Illinois, according to Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

His recent whereabouts

In recent months, Hodgkinson had been living out of a white cargo van in Alexandria on a block that borders the baseball field, according to the FBI. Former Alexandria Mayor Bill Euille told CNN he had regular encounters with Hodgkinson at a YMCA near the field where Euille exercises.

Hodgkinson would ask the mayor for restaurant and bar recommendations within walking distance of the facility. Euille said the man appeared to be living out of a gym bag with all his possessions.

Stephen Brennwald, a 57-year old trial attorney who also works out at the YMCA, said he regularly saw Hodgkinson there in recent weeks, always on his laptop. “He didn’t fit into our gym at all. I never once saw him work out, never once saw him in workout clothes,” Brennwald said.

Hodgkinson also hung out on a bench in the park by the baseball field, nearby residents said.

Alison Manson would steer her one-year-old daughter away from him.

“I just thought he looked homeless,” she said. “He had a lot of bags with him.”

Alison’s husband, George, said he sometimes tried to say hello to Hodgkinson. He would not respond.

“He didn’t seem scary,” George Manson said, “he just seemed out of it.”

CORRECTION: *An earlier version of this story referred to the SKS rifle as an AK variant. In fact, the SKS predates the AK.*

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